CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

TIMES.

[Price One Shilling.]

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LONDON,
Printed for J. ALMON, oppoſite Burlington-Houſe, in Piccadilly.

M DCC LXIX.

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IT is not my intention in theſe ſheets either to accuſe the preſent adminiſtration, or to reconſider the ſeveral cauſes which have brought this nation into circumſtances, which the moſt conſummate wiſdom, united with the greateſt integrity of heart, are ſcarce ſufficient to extricate us out of; ſo great, at leaſt to appearance, are our preſent difficulties; for I am conſcious, that if I were to enumerate the cauſes which have produced theſe effects, I muſt be obliged to diſcover many latent evils, and deduce the origin of them from the conduct of men, who are no more, or to blame others whoſe abilities would not permit them to launch out into a new road,

but were content to follow the beaten path of their predeceſſors. Others perhaps, who had more honeſty of heart, were deſirous of being inſtrumental to the good of their country, but have been diſcouraged by the difficulty of ſerving it, and thought it *in vain to kick againſt thorns.* Of late years, indeed, whoever have been employed in public affairs, have conſidered themſelves as mere ſojourners, and their ſituation precarious, even to a proverb; in conſequence thereof their only views have been to enrich themſelves, and get reverſions for their families. Accordingly their thoughts have been confined to the buſineſs of the day, their ideas being too narrow and contracted to look into futurity; and they have conſtantly conſidered, that whatever ſyſtem they might lay down, ſome other might come in, to reap the benefit of it. In a nation like this, where every man thinks he has a right to condemn or applaud the conduct of a miniſter, it is difficult to find two perſons who are of the ſame opinion with regard to any man in public life; and thus envy, ambition, and even friendſhip itſelf, induce many to view the characters of miniſters in very different lights. Even hiſtorians are ſeldom totally free from this bias. How then can we expect impartiality from thoſe who are themſelves intereſted in the queſtion? But dropping the point on whom the blame

blame is to be laid, I fear every man will readily agree with me in this propoſition, that at preſent the affairs of this country require ſome ſpeedy and effectual relief; a relief which is not to be come at by any change in adminiſtration, but by ſalutary meaſures that muſt be adopted: the firſt principles of government muſt be conſidered, we muſt revert to our old conſtitution; for whenever vices have crept into our body politic, they muſt be purged away. I remember a noble Lord once told me, that if one angry Duke choſe to reſign, another neceſſitous one would be found to ſupply his place, or Earl for Earl: theſe are not the changes every honeſt man wiſhes to ſee, for we have had experience enough from hiſtory, that thoſe governments which depend upon either mercenary ſoldiers or mercenary ſervants, can never be permanent. The ſtrength of every nation conſiſts in the number of its inhabitants, and their force is cemented by every individual having an intereſt in ſupporting the cauſe of the whole: the wiſeſt legiſlators have always conſidered this cement ſo eſſential to perpetuate a ſtate, that experience informs us this plan was never neglected in early times, except by tyrants and uſurpers, and thoſe republicks remained the longeſt, where the people had a ſhare and an intereſt in the government. Hiſtory tells us the Helots

always rebelled againſt the Lacedæmonians when they were invaded by a foreign enemy, and the reaſon is obvious; *human nature is incapable of ſlavery.* I have ſeen it ſomewhere obſerved, that perpetual ſlavery is perpetual war: where the people have no ſhare in the government, they are prone to ſeditions, they have no curb upon their magiſtrates, and the inſolence of office is too apt to induce them to trample upon their inferiors. Liberty was never more enjoyed than in Greece; what effect had it? Greece was invincible. It is true ſhe was torn in pieces by inteſtine broils, but freemen were to be conquered only by men equally free. It is a matter of ſome curioſity to conſider in what manner Rome from an infant ſtate grew to ſuch exceeding greatneſs. It was not the richneſs of the ſoil; it was not that agriculture flouriſhed more in that ſpot than in other parts of Italy. Was Heaven then peculiarly favourable to Rome? No. What then made Tatius, a powerful prince, leave his own kingdom over the Sabines, to live at Rome? Liberty had early broke through the cloud of barbariſm that enveloped it. Tatius preferred a joint command over a free people, before the ſovereignty of ſubjects who were leſs acquainted with it. The people themſelves flocked to Rome from all parts. I think in about thirty-ſeven years, from

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an army of three, they were increaſed to near forty thouſand men. Thus it was liberty indeared the ſoil to its inhabitants; each man thought himſelf concerned in the preſervation of the whole; the richer ſort were appointed magiſtrates and judges, and were dedicated to the government of the city; the poorer were excuſed from theſe duties, as being unacquainted with them, and from their ſmall fortunes likewiſe, wanting leiſure to attend them; but they were a check upon their magiſtrates, as ſeveral offices could not be acquired but by the votes of the people, and no law could be confirmed for the benefit of the whole ſociety without the general conſent. I admire theſe inſtitutions of the founder, and they muſt be read with pleaſure by every Engliſhman, as they have ſuch a near affinity to our own conſtitution. We have ſtill preſerved the eſſence of government in the hands of the people, and we are all equally bound by the laws of the land, and not by the arbitrary will and caprice of one man; and while we ſupport thoſe laws, as intended by their inſtitution, this country muſt be great and glorious. England, of which we are the conſtituents, hath ever been free, and celebrated in hiſtory, and it is owing to our policy that we, a ſmall iſland, ſhould at particular periods be able to give law to all Europe. It is that liberty

which

which we enjoy makes us warm in the field of battle, and cool in the hour of debate. The former, becauſe the love of one's country hath the greateſt influence over a freeborn mind, and of courſe inſpires the keeneſt ſenſe of ſhame. We are good at debate, as our education teaches us to reverence the law, and make the inſtitutions of our anceſtors the ſtandards from whence we are never to depart. An author ſays, "That the good government of cities "is owing to theſe cauſes: firſt, the fa-"vour of Providence, the enjoyment of "which gives ſucceſs to every enterprize: "next, temperance and juſtice, by which "the citizens being leſs diſpoſed to injure "one another, are more inclinable to una-"nimity, and to make virtue, not ſhame-"ful pleaſures, the meaſure of their hap-"pineſs. And laſtly, military courage, "which renders even the other virtues "uſeful to their poſſeſſors, and that none "of theſe cauſes are the effects of chance, "but that good laws and the emulation of "worthy purſuits, render a commonwealth "pious, juſt, temperate, and warlike." This was the principle on which Rome founded her laws; and theſe muſt be the maxims of every wiſe government. It is with a ſtate as with the human body; ſhe will flouriſh and be in vigour as long as ſhe remains temperate and virtuous. We find in Tacitus,

Tacitus, that the ſenate conſiſted of many of the ſame families whoſe anceſtors had carried the victorious eagle, or, which muſt benefit mankind much more, their virtues, their laws, and their examples to the extremity of the world. Some few there were whoſe vices ingratiated them into the favour of the tyrant Tiberius, and vice in them ſupplied the place of virtue, while flattery made up for the want of abilities, and debauchery and obſceneneſs ſerved inſtead of merit and morality. The name of Roman indeed ſtill remained, but the virtues had been long extinct; yet it was theſe virtues were the pillars of the conſtitution. It was theſe that preſerved her, though engaged in great wars, both in Spain and Italy, employed in recovering Sicily and Sardinia which had revolted, Macedon and Greece being at the ſame time in arms againſt them, and Carthage contending again for empire, while the greateſt part of Italy was not only in open rebellion, but alſo inviting Hannibal to their aſſiſtance. Though ſurrounded (I ſay) with ſo many dangers at the ſame time, the Romans were ſo far from being oppreſſed by theſe misfortunes, that they derived even from thence additional ſtrength: the number of their ſoldiers enabled them to encounter every danger, and not, as ſome imagine, the benevolence of fortune, ſince, for all her aſſiſtance, they had

had been utterly ruined by the ſingle defeat at Cannæ; where of ſix thouſand horſe, only three hundred and ſeventy, and of fourſcore thouſand foot, of which the infantry of the commonwealth conſiſted, little more than three thouſand eſcaped. Monteſquieu very juſtly obſerves, " Voici " en un mot l'hiſtoire des Romains. Ils " vainquerent tous les peuples par leurs " maximes, mais lorſqu'ils y furent parve- " nus, leur republique ne peut ſubſiſter. Il " fallut changer de gouvernement, & des " maximes contraires aux premieres. Em- " ployer dans ce gouvernement nouveau, " ils firent tomber leur grandeur. Ce n'eſt " pas la fortune qui domine le monde. On " peut le demander aux Romains, qui eurent " une ſuite continuelle de proſperités, quand " ils ſe gouvernent ſur un certain plan, & " une ſuite non interrompus de revers, lorſ- " que qu'ils ſe conduiſirent ſur une autre. " Il y a des cauſes generales, ſoit morales, " ſoit phyſiques, qui agiſſent dans chaque " monarchie, l'elevent, la maintiennent, ou " la precipitent. Tous les accidens ſont " ſoumis à ces cauſes; & ſi le hazard d'une " bataille, c'eſt-a-dire, une cauſe particu- " liere a ruiné un etat, il y avoit une cauſe " generale qui faiſoit que cet etat devoit " perir par une ſeule bataille; en un mot, " l'allure principale entraine avec elle tous " les accidens particuliers." That is, for

the benefit of the Engliſh reader, "Be-
" hold here in a word (ſays Monteſquieu)
" the hiſtory of the Romans. They van-
" quiſhed all nations by their maxims,
" but when they had proceeded ſo far,
" their ſtate was no longer able to ſubſiſt.
" It became neceſſary to change their form
" of government, and to have recourſe to
" maxims contrary to thoſe adopted be-
" fore. Employed in this new conſtitu-
" tion, their grandeur ſoon received a fall.
" It is not fortune that governs the world,
" we may aſk this queſtion of the Ro-
" mans, who enjoyed one continual ſeries of
" proſperity while they governed on a par-
" ticular plan, and an uninterrupted ſeries
" of ill ſucceſs, when they conducted
" themſelves on a contrary. There are
" general cauſes, either moral or phyſical,
" which operate in every government,
" exalt, maintain, or deſtroy it. All the
" events that happen are ſubjected to theſe
" cauſes; and if by chance the loſs of a
" battle, that is to ſay, any particular
" cauſe, has deſtroyed a ſtate, there al-
" ways has been ſome other general cauſe
" which was the occaſion of its periſhing
" by a ſingle battle; in a word, the prin-
" cipal bias drags along with it all other
" particular accidents."

Perhaps I have been too tedious upon this ſubject, but hiſtory is philoſophy

taught by example; and though not ſo uſeful as what we learn by our own experience, and does not make quite ſo deep an impreſſion, yet knowledge gained by that ſtudy is purchaſed at a much cheaper rate; we have a full view of the whole picture before our eyes; we may emulate the beauties of the painter, and find fault, and avoid his defects; the ſpace of life allotted to us here is too ſhort and confined to permit us to ſee objects in any other but a narrow and partial view, and few are bleſt with that rectitude of heart to allow them to give ſufficient merit to their rivals or their enemies, and not to wiſh to throw a veil over the vices of a friend. Party alſo, as we have ſaid before, too often vitiates our judgement. Thus Livy would be read with more impartiality by an Engliſhman than a Roman; and Plutarch in every compariſon ſhows himſelf the Grecian. Every man who is capable of reflection ſees what governments have been moſt laſting; by what means they aroſe, and how they declined. For my own part, I never was ſo dazzled with the Perſian luxury, as to deſpiſe the ſimple manners of the Spartans. I conſider one under the appellation of tranquillity to be mere bondage, and the other to be the height of earthly felicity, that of doing what the laws of the country do not reſtrain.

In the preceding pages I have endeavoured, to the beſt of my abilities, to ſhow how ſtates have aroſe ; I ſhall next conſider what occaſions their decline. Providence hath placed us in a country opulent in itſelf, and induſtry hath made us the greateſt commercial ſtate in Europe: we are bleſt with laws which breathe the ſpirit of freedom ; ancient and modern hiſtory have been ranſacked to form a conſtitution as laſting as human abilities can make. In a word, how fond of liberty, how wiſe and conſiderate were our anceſtors, who by the Great Charter ſecured the liberties and property of even foreigners who might ſeek protection, and come to inhabit among us. What has always been the preſervation of a ſmall ſtate? Diffidence and jealouſy. What the ruin of a great and opulent one? Corruption and venality. I hope that will never be the ſituation of this country ; but ſhould a time come when ſeats in parliament are openly put up to auction, and men become repreſentatives of the people, merely by a pecuniary influence, as merchants, in hopes of contracts ; commiſſaries, in expectation of a future war ; or, who on former occaſions have betrayed their country and embezzled the public money ; ſhould ſuch in modern Rome, who fly to the altar, conſcious they deſerve to be the victims of Juſtice, but

ſcreened by their ſituation, lurk in their aſylum till their crime is forgotten; then, by acquiring a ſeat in parliament, hope to expiate their offences by ſerving the black purpoſes of a deſigning miniſter; or ſhould the houſe be filled with lawyers, who build their hopes on the power of the crown, whoſe intereſt obliges them to diſregard the cries of a poor diſtreſſed people, from whom the only fee they can receive, is, that innate ſatisfaction of having done their duty; but in exchange for which they may expect to be a judge, chief-juſtice, or chancellor; or, ſhould the ſtewards and dependents on the nobility obtain ſeats in parliament, they ſtill remain the creatures of thoſe lords, whom extravagancies and luxury of the age oblige to be the humble ſuitors of arrogant miniſters. The terms propoſed are always thoſe of ſacrificing themſelves, their dependents, conſciences, and the laws of their country, to enable them to contribute their ſhares to thoſe taxes, which every miniſter, who has wickedneſs enough to make the attempt, will always find neceſſary to enſlave his country; or, ſhould thoſe gentlemen whoſe landed property obliges them to be the guardians of this conſtitution, and whom cuſtom and intereſt have endeared to their native ſoil; ſhould they be driven out of their family intereſt in a

borough

borough by ſome hireling of government, and elbowed by one who corrupts his conſtituents, in order to proſtitute himſelf to adminiſtration; the country gentleman hath this alternative before his eyes, either the mortification of being put on the ſame footing with a ſtranger, perhaps in that city or borough which his anceſtors have repreſented for many years, or to retire to his country-ſeat, and ſee himſelf, his tenants, and his neighbours, taxed at the arbitrary will of the tools to men in power, who are to divide the ſpoils of their country with their rapacious maſters. What would the ſtate of this country be if parliaments were corrupt? A parliament entailed upon us for ſeven years! In that period of time we ſhould not only become ſlaves, but our necks alſo might be habituated to the yoke of ſervitude. Ever ſince the revolution, the power of the crown hath been increaſing: it is true, prerogative hath been leſſened in the laſt century, and it is well for us it was ſo; for the ſtar-chamber and high-commiſſion-court, together with the power of levying taxes upon the ſubject, would by this time have rendered our princes deſpotic: though I confeſs I think a revenue in time of peace of ten millions a year (and which I do not ſee any great proſpect of leſſening, and that ſum annually

ally go[illegible] through the hands of the crown, by which means the crown has many methods of ſtrengthening itſelf, and creating innumerable dependents); theſe revenues, I ſay, make ample amends for that power it loſt by the act of 12th of Charles II. A learned gentleman, to whom the youth in this kingdom are much obliged, who has unfolded the myſteries of the law, and at the ſame time hath manifeſted the utility that ſcience is of to every gentleman, whether he has an hereditary right to a ſeat in the upper houſe, or is choſen a repreſentative in the lower houſe of parliament, obſerves, that "The inſtruments of power "are not perhaps ſo open and avowed as "they formerly were, and therefore are "the leſs liable to jealous and invidious "reflections; but they are not the weaker "(ſays he) upon that account. Our national debt and taxes have, in their natural conſequences, thrown ſuch a weight "of power into the hands of the crown, as "we cannot think was intended by our patriot anceſtors, who glorioufly ſtruggled "for the abolition of the then formidable "parts of the prerogative; and by an unaccountable want of foreſight, eſtabliſhed this ſyſtem in their ſtead. The entire collection and management of ſo "vaſt a revenue being placed in the hands "of the crown, have given riſe to ſuch a

"multi-

" multitude of new officers created by,
" and removeable at, the royal pleaſure,
" that they have extended the influence of
" government to every corner of the king-
" dom." Any gentleman who will give himſelf the trouble to read over the liſt of members of parliament, will be convinced that more than one half receive ſalaries from the crown. It is true, that none but gentlemen of landed property can enjoy a ſeat in that houſe; but the eſtate is ſo very ſmall which is required by the act, no more than ſix hundred pounds for a knight of a ſhire, and only three for a burgeſs; and the temptations which the crown hath in its hands are ſo great, that it requires much virtue to withſtand. I do not imagine the trial has ever been made; but it is not impoſſible but one time or other it may be made by ſome ambitious miniſter, when he deſires to carry a favourite point. He may tell theſe gentlemen who receive ſalaries from government, that it is expected by the crown (for the crown is always made uſe of to ſtrengthen the ſcheme of the miniſter) that they ſhould ſerve him upon the queſtion he propoſes, or loſe their places. I will ſuppoſe the gentleman applied to is a colonel of a regiment, or a lord of the treaſury, admiralty, or board of trade. The firſt will think he has a diſagreeable alternative, either

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to betray the truſt repoſed in him by his conſtituents, or to loſe at once what has been the ambition of his life, and acquired with glory to himſelf and advantage to his country. For the others, whether gentlemen whoſe induſtry hath raiſed them to theſe places of truſt, and whoſe parliamentary abilities are the beſt ſupport they have, or recommended by any other means, I ſhall only ſay that it requires much virtue to withſtand the temptation; and as long as we have ſeptennial parliaments, whenever either an ambitious king, or an enterpriſing miniſter, can corrupt the majority of the houſe of commons, the liberty of this country will be totally annihilated. We have already had experience enough of the parental kindneſs of his preſent majeſty, to be convinced that he has no deſign to ſubvert the conſtitution; and happy would it be, if every king had the good of his ſubjects as much at heart as much as our preſent moſt amiable monarch. For though I have been bred a whig, and ever ſince I was capable of reflection, always admired thoſe governments where the law, and not the will or caprice of the prince, governed the ſtate; yet I will venture to ſay, I could ſafely entruſt my liberty, and whatever is dear to a freeborn ſubject, in the hands of the king. Therefore, as long as he reigns, I make no doubt but I ſhall paſs the remainder

mainder of my days as in an Auguſtan æra. But when the law is once broke, and the conſtitution ſubverted, under a future prince's reign, my children may be ſcourged by a Tiberius or a Nero.

I am now come to a point which I am conſcious muſt be attended with much difficulty; for I am to endeavour to convince by arguments, men whoſe intereſt (the ſtrongeſt motive in nature) makes them differ in opinion from me. I know that thoſe who are acquainted with the world muſt acknowledge, that wealth and luxury are always attended with bribery and corruption, Roman virtue made Aſia a province to her commonwealth, and Aſiatic luxury and riches laid the foundation for undoing Rome, which in the next age Cæſar completed by the ſpoils of conquered nations. By theſe he was enabled to corrupt the people, and bribe them to be the inſtruments of their own ruin. As inſtinct points out to every animal what is ſalutary and moſt conducive to his health, and what is obnoxious and hurful, ſo reaſon and experience indicate to man, that purity of morals is the preſervative, and that corruption and bribery are the deſtruction of a ſtate. As ruſt is the natural deſtroyer of iron, and worms of wood, by which in time, as by inbred evils, they muſt be conſumed, ſo in like manner, am-

bition is a vice concomitant with riches: thoſe of ſuperior fortune can ſeldom be reconciled to that equality which a democratical ſtate requires, but become proud in their own conceits, and unable to obtain the power they aim at by any ſuperior merit, diſſipate their wealth in alluring and corrupting the people; and when, to ſerve their ambitious views, they have taught them to receive the ſtipend of corruption, from that inſtant the commonwealth is at an end; for the people being accuſtomed to neglect their private concerns, their minds become vitiated, and they are no longer regardful of their liberty.

I am afraid it will be very difficult to lay down a plan entirely to make this conſtitution ſuch as our patriotic anceſtors firſt intended it, eſpecially as I have ſome reaſon to ſuſpect the temper of the times to be rather to take advantage of the miſeries of the people, than to reform the ſtate. Far be it from me, however, to ſay, that corruption hath got poſſeſſion of this country; but the very ſuſpicion of it is attended with danger. I have heard of many remedies indeed; but the propoſers ſeem to deal with the conſtitution, as phyſicians treat their patients, rather to preſcribe than cure. The only effectual method ſeems to me to be annual parliaments: theſe

theſe may avoid every inconvenience; they will deſtroy all corruption, becauſe no man will think it worth his while to corrupt his conſtituents. Merit only will then be regarded, not pecuniary influence: a ſeat in parliament will be no longer looked upon as a pretenſe for a contract with government, a place or a penſion, but as a diſintereſted honour conferred by a diſintereſted people; and I make no doubt but that there will be found a ſufficient number of gentlemen ready to ſerve their country on this equitable condition. There is not a man, I believe in Great-Britain, who is not convinced that annual parliaments muſt put an end to corruption, and annihilate all miniſterial influence in every borough; but gentlemen who either are in adminiſtration, or expect one day or other to be miniſters, can never conſent to permit the enjoyment of their ſalaries to be held by ſo precarious a tenure. But is it not more for the intereſt of this country, that miniſters ſhould be tenants at the will of the people; and that the repreſentatives ſhould take annually the ſenſe of their conſtituents, who may either reject or approve according to their merits? I have been ſurpriſed that oppoſitions have not thought of this expedient; but I believe we may account for it in this manner, that moſt gentlemen who are in oppoſition,

one day or other expect to be in adminiſtration; and they are conſcious that no one point could poſſibly be carried (if members were to be annually accountable to their conſtituents) that infringes upon what the ſubjects call their juſt rights; and they are likewiſe convinced, that if it were once propoſed in the houſe, thoſe who propoſed it would be joined by the general cry of the people, and of conſequence, that when they had once broke aſunder the chains of their fellow-ſubjects, in order to diſtreſs the miniſters of the day, they would only forge others for themſelves, when they came to enjoy their places. Gentlemen have been drawn to many expedients, in order to ſupply the neceſſity of calling a new parliament every year. Recourſe has been had to the penſions, and an act has paſſed to diſable thoſe who accept employments from ſitting in the houſe, unleſs they be re-elected. But this act, inſtead of being an advantage to the ſubject, is often perverted to ſerve the purpoſe of the miniſter; and we have lately had two remarkable inſtances of it: the firſt, of a gentleman's acceptation of the Chiltern hundred to vacate his ſeat in parliament, in order to become a candidate for the county of Middleſex: the ſecond, of a learned gentleman, who unſeaſonably declared the law of the land in

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an auguſt aſſembly, and thereby offended his patron, who now actually enjoys one of the beſt fortunes in this kingdom, and who, from nothing more than a ſimple c——y in the army, hath acquired a miniſterial fortune with a very great parliamentary intereſt; the latter of no ſmall conſequence to thoſe who riſe ſo ſuddenly, and, in conſequence thereof, may ſometimes have occaſion to buy their peace with government. This act then, which was intended for the benefit of the ſubject, is often perverted, and attended with many inconveniencies; as ſeveral inſtances have convinced every gentleman of, which it would be nugatory for me to enumerate.

We formerly had triennial parliaments, but hiſtory informs us triennial parliaments were ineffectual, and that they produced triennial miniſters; I ſuppoſe gentlemen in power ſuſpect that annual parliaments may produce annual adminiſtrations; but this will never be the caſe; nor do we find that in former times good miniſters were of ſhorter duration than at preſent.

We read in the Roman hiſtory, when bribery and corruption were unknown to that commonwealth, though the conſuls were choſen annually, they always found men of integrity to fill that office, and people were to be met with who thought it ſufficient to be ſerviceable to their country.

try. Precedents may be brought, even from our own hiſtory, to the ſame purpoſe; and in proof of the ſucceſs with which matters were then managed, under Edward III, the French king (John) was taken priſoner, and France was conquered by Henry V. all under the auſpices of annual parliaments. It is thought by many people, that the ſeptennial act was the ſevereſt ſtab the liberties of this country ever received; but the circumſtances of the nation, at the time of its being enacted, in a good meaſure juſtify it. There had lately been an actual rebellion. The rebellion might indeed have been laid, but the effect was very viſible all over the nation. However, if theſe circumſtances, while they ſubſiſted, were a reaſon for enacting that law, they are long ſince removed. None of thoſe reaſons remain at preſent. There is no man who will not allow, that in all free governments, the oftener the collective body of the people is reſorted to, the more frequently they will have opportunities of reforming thoſe grievances which will from time to time unavoidably ſteal into the legiſlative, as well as into the executive parts of government; and while they have legal methods of redreſs, mankind will never fly to thoſe which are not ſo. This would be one great advantage of annual parliaments; for, to ſuppoſe that the

the repreſentatives of the people will at all times be as vigilant to diſcover, and as zealous to reform thoſe grievances, or as careful of their own conduct in every reſpect, when they are independent of their conſtituents for ſeven years, as when they depend annually upon their approbation, is to ſuppoſe that hopes and fears have loſt their influence on the minds of men. If there ever was a time when the nation had no reaſon to apprehend danger from the power of the people being delegated into the hands of their repreſentatives for ſeven years, it is the preſent, ſince the nation has a recent inſtance in the caſe of a northern county, where parliament, when they thought the rights of the people infringed, had virtue enough to leave adminiſtration with a ſmall minority; that adminiſtration which actually now raiſes ten millions a year on the ſubject, no inconſiderable part of which is diſtributed among its dependents: what a temptation was this for any but the preſent virtuous parliament, which has acted in it becoming of that truſt repoſed in them, and did not ſuffer the rights of the freeholders with impunity to be infringed, nor the officer who made the attempt, to eſcape without juſt puniſhment?

I have ſaid in the former part of my argument, that though providence hath bleſt

bleſt this country with the beſt of kings, it is neither wiſe nor prudent to entruſt any more power in the hands of the crown than the law of the land permits: and, by the ſame rule, though the lower houſe of parliament is a part of ourſelves, their power delegated by us, and to us muſt return, as ſoon as the ſtated time is elapſed; and whatever laws they enact for the benefit of the people, they likewiſe are benefitted themſelves; alſo whatever is a diſadvantage to the liberties of the ſubject, is a mutual prejudice to them. Yet I am of opinion, the oftener they take the ſenſe of the people, liberty will be better ſecured. Our anceſtors ſummoned a parliament to do the neceſſary buſineſs of the nation, and then became afterwards like their conſtituents. In the Roman ſtate a dictator has been appointed, who has completed his ſervice for his country, and reſigned his office in ſixteen days. The liberties of Rome were never annihilated till ſhe made her dictator perpetual; nor can England be ruined but by a ſtanding parliament. There is ſomething ſo very bewitching in power, that without very compulſive laws, men are not eaſily brought to reſign it. This tenaciouſneſs of power has filled all hiſtories, both ancient and modern, with attempts made to extend it beyond the term for which it was originally delegated. The

Roman decemvirs, though choſen by their country but for a year, prolonged their term by their own act, and retained the power they had uſurped, till the people forced it out of their hands, and puniſhed them ſeverely for their uſurpation, and their memory is branded with the infamy it deſerves; while the names of Valerius Publicola and Horatius, under whoſe conduct the people recovered their right of electing annual magiſtrates, are celebrated by thoſe hiſtorians with all the praiſe that gratitude can yield, or merit claim; eternal monuments which no time can efface, but they receive a praiſe which will never decay. While honour is the meed of good actions, men who have been ſerviceable to their country will be held in eternal remembrance.

Enough has been ſaid to convince any one of the utility of annual parliaments; but I throw this out rather as a hint (though thoroughly ſatisfied of its utility myſelf) to induce mankind firſt to think, and then determine. In caſe of urgent neceſſity, ſtates muſt reſolve with precipitation; but in time of tranquillity, government ſhould act with caution, temper and wiſdom. In the former part of theſe conſiderations I have been very far from ſaying, that parliament at preſent is corrupt; but this I will venture to ſay, that when the minds of men are

inclined to be mercenary, adminiſtration have it in their power to tempt. If I know any thing of this conſtitution, either from my own private experience, or, what is more to the purpoſe, from the knowledge and learning of others who have treated upon this ſubject, all ſeem to agree, that whenever the majority of parliament is corrupted, this country muſt be a ſtate of ſlavery. In the human body there are ſeveral ſigns which indicate diſtempers, and foretell the approach of death; ſo in like manner luxury and corruption prognoſticate the diſſolution of a ſtate. There may be ſome governments where moral virtue is not of ſo much neceſſary conſequence, but in a democratical conſtitution, it is the very pillar; and mankind will ſee in hiſtory, that commonwealths have always been ruined by departing from this principle. Philip divided the Græcians, and overturned their liberties, not ſo much by the force of his arms, as by the force of bribery; and Rome was in the zenith of her glory when Curius Dentatus gave his noble reply to the Samnite ambaſſadour. Sylla hurt the conſtitution of his country more, by introducing venality into the ſenate, than by his murders, proſcriptions, or any other violations. A ſtate may eaſily recover from any other calamity, but a luſt of riches preys upon the very vitals of it. Her caſe

is not unlike a man in a dropſy; whatever he touches aſſiſts not nature, but feeds the diſeaſe, becauſe he is burning with an inſatiable deſire. I had rather have been a Roman citizen when that ſtate was convulſed with all the calamities of ſedition, and the people retired to the Sacred Mount, than to have lived even in the reign of Auguſtus; for the voice of the people was then put up to auction to the beſt bidder. That degree of equality which a free ſtate requires, was at that time no longer regarded; the magiſtrates corrupted the tribes in order to gain their votes, and the magiſtrates were themſelves bribed to ſacrifice the conſtitution of their country. It was now no longer the law that governed, but the arbitrary will of one man, which abſorbed the freedom of the whole; the policy of the ſtate was reverſed, the people, who are the foundation of every government, were become venal and corrupt; the men in authority, beggared by the large ſums they were obliged to diſſipate, in order to corrupt and debauch the minds of the people, became neceſſitous themſelves: thus poverty and ambition drove all into violence and confuſion. For in whatever government mankind procure a pre-eminence over their fellow-citizens, not by merit, but by pecuniary influence, both the corrupters and thoſe who are corrupted be-

come ſlaves. Ever ſince the ſeptennial bill paſſed, the patriots of the age have regarded an undue influence in procuring ſeats in parliament to be the bane of this country, which one day or other muſt annihilate our liberties. In conſequence of this, it has been the deſire of many ſenſible men to take away that privilege from the ſmaller boroughs, which are thought to be more liable to be bought over by the crown; and there have been many inſtances of members themſelves being puniſhed, and boroughs disfranchiſed, when bribery hath been publickly proved againſt them: but the houſe of commons, after a time, have always thought fit to reſtore them to their privileges, and I think, with great reaſon; for nothing is more dangerous than to make any alterations in the laws and cuſtoms of a country. Sir John Forteſcue ſays, *Regnum hoc in omnibus nationum & regum temporibus, iiſdem quibus nunc regitur legibus & conſuetudinibus regebatur.* But to reſtore annual parliaments, is ſo far from being an innovation, that it is returning to the inſtitutions of our anceſtors, and going back to thoſe laws and cuſtoms which are venerable by their antiquity. I believe, during the time parliaments were choſen every year, there was no ſuſpicion of bribery. It may alſo be ſeen in hiſtory, that bad miniſters were oftener impeached during thoſe times,

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than at preſent; though I believe our kings were as much reſpected in Europe in thoſe days, as ſince our enormous debt hath thrown ſo much power into the hands of the crown. It cannot be an objection to annual parliaments, that they would create a vaſt expence: I confeſs I think every man would be a gainer by it. The miniſtry then (if ever they ſhould make an attempt to bribe them) will find it impoſſible to purſue that plan with any degree of ſucceſs; for it will require a much greater ſum than any miniſter can procure under the article of ſecret ſervice; ſo that thoſe ſums of money (if any have ever been ſo ſquandered) would revert to the Sinking Fund, and be a means of paying off a part of the national debt. Thoſe gentlemen too, who formerly have been at great expences at their elections, and have been obliged ſervilely to fawn at a miniſter's levee to repair their ſhattered fortunes, will not then have that excuſe to beg with. I dare propheſy, that in a few years the king would be ſerved by as able a ſet of men as at any time whatever. The houſe of commons likewiſe would be filled with as virtuous and diſintereſted members, and if it pleaſed God to continue peace to this nation for a few years, I ſhould not deſpair to live to ſee thoſe cruel taxes which lie ſo heavy upon the lower ſort of people, particularly thoſe

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on ſoap, candles and beer, taken off under the auſpices of annual parliaments. And there would be this one thing further, which I ſhould be ſanguine enough to expect to ſee accompliſhed, *viz.* a reduction of penſions, and the ſalaries of thoſe places which bring in from two to ten thouſand pounds a year much leſſened. I build my expectations upon this ground, that when gentlemen are obliged to take the ſenſe of their conſtituents every year, they will be more cautious in giving away the public money; and when that is once with-held, the hands of bad miniſters are tied; neceſſity will oblige them to be much more ſparing; if gentlemen were even wicked enough to corrupt any weak ignorant elector to ſell that ineſtimable bleſſing, his free voice of election, they would then have no temptation to do it. It would be their merits that the next year muſt recommend them to their conſtituents; the miniſter would entirely change his ſyſtem of proceeding; inſtead of gaining a majority, if ſuch a one could be procured, by money, he muſt acquire the hearts of the people by his merits: and whatever weak men may think of ſuch a tenure, experience both in ancient and modern times declares it to be the moſt durable in human nature. It is like a building founded on a rock, on which a glorious ſuperſtructure might be raiſed;

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there would be no danger that it would ever fall; " when the rains deſcended, and the " floods came, and the winds blew, and " beat upon it, they could not ſhake it." It might be examined and admired by the moſt curious architect, while her aſpiring towers would contemn every tempeſtuous blaſt; ſhe would remain ſolid and ſecure; and when worn out by the hand of time, would ſtill preſerve a venerable air of grandeur about her. I ſhall conclude theſe conſiderations with one more obſervation on party. Party is the natural attendant on power and riches, and the more a country has to give, the greater number of competitors there will be to receive. Several men of great authority have declared, that parties are not only natural, but even neceſſary, in free governments; like ſtorms in the natural world, they ſerve to diſperſe the ill humours that are collected in it. For though as Pope ſings,

Better to ſome perhaps it might appear,
Were there all harmony, all concord here;
That air nor ocean never felt the wind,
That paſſion never diſcompos'd the mind:
Yet all ſubſiſts by elemental ſtrife,
And paſſions are the elements of life.

So ſings that excellent poet, and this obſervation is equally applicable to our own

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conſtitution; for though oppoſition be not always grounded upon juſt and virtuous principles, yet is it ever a curb to adminiſtration; and though the leaders of a party may only intend to overthrow their rivals in power, yet by their attacks upon them, the public reaps much benefit, inaſmuch as ſuch conteſts prevent miniſters from purſuing bold and dangerous meaſures, which, if they were uncontrolled by an oppoſition, they might attempt. Thus they are compelled to act with caution, both in extending the prerogative of the crown, and in diſpoſing of the public money. The latter, in fact, only is the beſt ground an oppoſition can ſtand upon, as in promoting an enquiry into the diſpoſal of the public revenues, they are ſure to be joined by the people, who are the firſt that feel the extravagances of men in power; and the whole eyes of the nation are conſequently turned upon them, and the errors they commit are not only expoſed to public view, but often aggravated.

Another great advantage, ſays a learned author, that accrues to the people from this oppoſition, is, that each party, by appealing to them upon all occaſions, conſtitute them judges of every conteſt; and indeed, to whom ſhould they appeal, but to thoſe whoſe welfare is the deſign, or pretenſe of every meaſure? and for whoſe

happineſs

happineſs the majeſty of kings, the dignity of peers, and the power of the commons, were ſingly inſtituted. This is undoubtedly the end of their inſtitution; and this end it is their glory as well as duty to accompliſh: for what greater honour can be done to the three orders of which our government is ſo happily compoſed, than to look upon them as they really are; that is, as the channels through which eaſe, plenty, and ſecurity, are derived to millions of people? I make a very wide difference between a faction and a party, though the word is uſed analogous by way of reproach, by miniſters, of thoſe who diſapprove their meaſures: the former, I flatter myſelf, no longer exiſts in this kingdom, whatever it did in the beginning of the preſent century; for though the fathers of ſeveral of thoſe gentlemen, who now are near the king's perſon, wiſhed perhaps, out of principle, to ſee the royal family dethroned, yet I hope the ſons are convinced of the imprudence of their anceſtors, and will never add ingratitude towards the beſt of kings, to the miſguided errors of their predeceſſors. But party is the natural conſequence of liberty: in all free countries men have the privilege of ſpeaking their minds; and it is only in free ſtates they can do it with impunity. The freedom of the preſs is never allowed in arbitrary governments; and it has always

been the policy of thoſe ſtates to keep the people in ignorance. It is only in commonwealths that books can be publiſhed without the inſpection of the magiſtrates; and it was doubtleſs an infringement on the privilege of the ſubject when an act paſſed, that nothing ſhould be acted on the ſtage but what was licenſed by the lord chamberlain. A noble earl, in his ſpeech on that occaſion, called it "An exciſe upon wit;" and though wit may ſometimes degenerate into ſcurrility and abuſe, yet that is the tax a ſtate pays for its freedom. We may venture to ſay that we ſhall never ſee an extinction of party in theſe kingdoms (I mean an oppoſition to the meaſures of miniſters, for thank God his majeſty has not an enemy in theſe realms) till the power of the crown becomes ſo great, either by our national debt, or the profuſeneſs of the commons, as to enable men in power to corrupt the majority of the houſe: when that comes to be the caſe, the name of party will from that inſtant be unknown in England; thoſe few, who have any remains of virtue, will then not have the reſolution to oppoſe arbitrary meaſures, but will retire in deſpair to their country-ſeats; the people for a while will kiſs the rod that chaſtiſes them, till liberty making her laſt convulſive efforts, and mankind having no protection in the laws, will have recourſe to violence,

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and aſſembling together, murder, baniſh, and divide among themſelves the lands of their adverſaries, till finding no ſecurity where there is no law, in their haſte they will conſtitute a tyrant.

Every man who carefully reads the hiſtories both of modern and ancient times, will find that a government conſtituted as ours muſt be permanent; and the wiſeſt of legiſlators have contrived it to conſiſt of king, lords and commons, that thus by uniting the excellence of a compound, they may avoid the diſadvantage of a ſimple government. When the gladiator appears upon the ſtage, every grace, the excellence of each attitude, all his force, and even victory itſelf, depends on every part of the body bearing its juſt proportion to the reſt. If the true poiſe be loſt, he immediately becomes weak, his body is diſtorted, his ſtrength fails him, and he tumbles to the ground. So is it with a compound government of this ſort. Such a government remains firm and laſting as long as it preſerves itſelf equally poiſed and balanced. But if ever the corruption of the age can ſeduce the commons to give up their privilege into the hands of the crown, or the ſpirit of faction ſo far infatuate the minds of the people as to encroach on the juſt prerogatives of the crown, there will then be an end of government. The reſtoring of an-

nual parliaments would entirely free us from any apprehenſion of the former; for even could we ſuppoſe men, who are choſen to be the repreſentatives of the people, weak enough to ſet themſelves to ſale, and become the hirelings of a miniſter, yet their actions would ſoon ſhow the livery they wore; and with what face could they return to their conſtituents, and deſire to have their choice again confirmed, when they were conſcious they had abuſed their truſt? But there is no danger of their ever being put to ſuch tryal, as the hands of the crown are much ſtrengthened, and her dependents greatly increaſed within theſe few years, ſo that it is to be feared there is no great proſpect of ſeeing annual parliaments reſtored; for the poſſeſſion of power is ſo enticing, that few men perhaps can prevail upon themſelves to reſign it. I flatter myſelf, however, our liberties will ſtill be ſecured to us, though probably not in ſo effectual a manner as if the ſenſe of the people was to be taken annually. However, we ſhall always find ſome men whoſe virtues will not ſuffer them to countenance the illegal meaſures of miniſters, and others whoſe motives, though they may not be quite ſo upright, yet will prove equally ſalutary and beneficial to the people; for the eyes of the world will be turned upon them, and this will oblige them to be careful

ful how they act. The independent man will obſerve them, the ambitious envy them, the neceſſitous be diſſatisfied, and the wit, on the ſlighteſt occaſion, ridicule them: thus the attention of each is always turned towards adminiſtration, whilſt both ſides appeal to the people, and make them the judges of their reſpective conduct.

It happened in the laſt century, that the ambition of ſome few, inſtead of forming an oppoſition to the ſervants of government, made their attacks upon the crown itſelf, and unfortunately were too ſucceſsful. Party became a faction, and the deluded people ſaw, when it was too late, tyranny impoſed upon them under the ſpecious ſhadow of liberty. This misfortune might have been prevented, had that age enjoyed annual parliaments; the people might have united in gaining a victory over an ambitious miniſter, but never could have joined in a conqueſt over their king and conſtitution.

I ſee this double advantage in annual parliaments, that the people by means of them have a check upon their repreſentatives, whether they be too much inclined towards prerogative, or whether ambition, as in the inſtance before mentioned, leads them to reſolve to be independent of the other parts of the legiſlature. At that time they broke the conſtitution, by putting it

out of the power of the crown to diſſolve the parliament; and they afterwards voted the houſe of peers uſeleſs, by bringing their ſovereign to an ignominious death. But notwithſtanding the minds of people were much deluded, they ſaw their error, though it was then too late to ſeek a remedy; they found by experience how tenacious men are of power when once delegated to them; and they likewiſe ſaw how dangerous a thing it was to make the people of no further utility. While honours and advantage are in the hands of the latter, and to be delegated by them to the moſt deſerving, the ambitious man will wear a maſk, and vice will outwardly carry the appearance of virtue; for though various paſſions may miſguide the minds of the many, yet every one, however vicious his own conduct may be, cannot help admiring the good and honeſt man; and where the people are uncorrupted and left to a free choice, virtue and merit lead the way to honour and dignities: when the contrary effect appears, it foretells the deſtruction of a ſtate. Rome, by ſad experience, verifies the truth of this aſſertion. So long as the ſpirit of liberty prevailed, a Roman ſacrificed his own, and therefore, no doubt, every other perſonal intereſt, to the intereſt of the commonwealth; but when corruption and venality ſucceeded, the common

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welfare was conſidered no otherwiſe than in ſubordination to private views. The principal men, inſtead of making their grandeur and glory conſiſt, as they formerly had done, in the rays which the grandeur and liberty of the commonwealth reflected on them, conſidered themſelves now as individuals, and not citizens, and each would ſhine with his own light. To this purpoſe alone they employed the commands they had of armies, the government of provinces, and the influence they acquired over the people. Upon principles of the ſame nature their inferiors attached themſelves to the great; and that zeal and induſtry, nay, that very courage and magnanimity, which had formerly been exerted in the ſervice of the commonwealth, were now exerted, by means of corruption and venality, in favour of Marius or Sylla, Cæſar or Pompey, as their different intereſts ſwayed.

Thus we have ſeen what is the bane and deſtruction of every free government; and as the depravity of human nature is ſuch, that laws are neceſſary to reſtrain the vicicious and reward the virtuous and the good; as wealth and riches are the fruits of pains and induſtry, and victory is the reward of courage and perſeverance, ſo in ſtates, honour and dignity ſhould be diſtributed to thoſe who excel in merit. While this is

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the policy, our armies ſhall triumph in the field, judgement ſhall guide in the cabinet, and unanimity join and unite the body of the people. For as nature hath imprinted on the minds of all an emulation to excell, virtue but turns the tide of the paſſions, and makes mankind, inſtead of deſiring thoſe tranſient toys which fortune indiſcriminately beſtows, apply themſelves to ſomewhat more laſting. She teaches the mind to aſpire to more ſubſtantial bleſſings, bleſſings which ſecure comfort to the poſſeſſor, advantage to our country, and admiration from all poſterity.

F I N I S.